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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT

THURSDAY, JANUARY 3, 2008

In Today's Papers

Forensic Tests Conclude Ogun Samast Was 19 When He Killed Hrant Dink

All papers report the Istanbul Forensic Medicine Institution said a bone density test proved that Ogun Samast was 19 years old when he killed the Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink. Now, the court will decide whether to consider the population registry records or the bone density test as the best proof of age. If the court determines Samast was not a minor when he committed the murder, he could be sentenced to life in prison. If the court determines Samast was a minor when he committed the murder, he could be sentenced to a maximum of 17 years in prison.

Bush-Gul to Meet at White House January 8th

Hurriyet, Milliyet, Sabah, Radikal, Cumhuriyet, Zaman, Yeni Safak and others report

President Bush will receive President Abdullah Gul at the White House on January 8th. After the meeting, Bush will embark on a tour of the Middle East. In his first visit to Washington as President, Gul is expected to discuss the situations in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Lebanon, as well as Turkish operations in northern Iraq. Mainstream Vatan says that on January 8th, Gul will have breakfast with Secretary Rice and mainstream Hurriyet says Gul will meet Vice

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President Dick Cheney before meeting Bush. Bush and Gul will have lunch together after the meeting.

Syria Wants More Water from Turkey

All papers report a Syrian delegation headed by Deputy Prime Minister Abdallah al-Dardari is engaging in talks in Ankara. In a meeting Wednesday, Dardari reportedly asked Turkey to release more water from the Euphrates River for Syrian use. Environment Minister Veysel Eroglu responded by saying Turkey is acting in compliance with the bilateral agreement, where 500 cubic meters of water is released per second. "Turkey is currently suffering from drought.

If we have abundant rainfall, more water could be released for Syria," Eroglu said. The Syrian delegation also met with Turkish businessmen in Ankara yesterday; during the meeting, Dardari asked the Turkish Union of Chambers (TOBB) to organize an industrial zone on a 2500 hectare field in Syria.

Cicek: "Overhauling Turkey's Constitution Is As Hard As Moving Mt. Ararat"

Deputy Prime Minister Cemil Cicek told mainstream Sabah overhauling Turkey's constitution is like "moving Mount Ararat," but he pledged that the task will be done.

Cicek said the AKP government has not examined the draft constitution yet, but called the process a "victory for democracy." Cicek rejected allegations that the AKP has "hidden intentions" regarding constitutional reform. "The draft has been prepared by the AKP, but the constitution is not designed to serve the interests of AKP. Charges that the new constitution will undermine the regime are ungrounded," said Cicek. He noted the "irrevocable" provisions of the constitution will be preserved.

Islamist-oriented Zaman writes Turkey's new draft "civilian" constitution will limit presidential powers to appoint officials, allow affirmative action for women and allow the use of Kurdish and other languages in courts. The draft introduces a new definition of "Turkishness." The existing constitution says all citizens of the Turkish state are Turks, whereas the new draft says "all citizens of the Turkish state are Turks regardless of their race and religion." According to the new draft constitution, a political party can be banned only if it fails to arrange its regulations and programs within the constitutional provisions. If a party is banned, the members of the disbanded party will not lose their parliamentary membership. The Higher Education Board (YOK) will be abolished and replaced by the "Higher Education Coordination Board" (YOKK), which is to have financial and administrative autonomy. The draft contains no changes regarding the status of the National Security

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Council (MGK). Prime Minister Erdogan will make the final decisions regarding controversial issues such as the headscarf ban, the trial of the chief of the military General Staff, and presidential appointments. The draft will be opened for public debate and will be submitted to parliament in the spring. The ruling AKP plans to hold a referendum on the constitution in the fall.

Editorial Commentary on New Constitution

Ergun Babahan commented in mainstream Sabah (1/3): "During his interview with Cumhuriyet, CHP leader Baykal announced 2008 as a year of constitutional crisis for Turkey. Deputy PM Cemil Cicek talked to Sabah and explained the difficulties of amending a constitution. Cicek is right to say that "changing the constitution is as hard as moving a mountain." The current constitution is a product of a revolution which only considered the state as a sole power. There are political circles that do not want to lose their constitutional powers; these same circles are also against reforms which will carry Turkey toward EU accession. Despite this resistance, Turkey is changing. This constitution has unchangeable provisions, including secularism, a unitary state system, and designation of Turkish as the official language. But obviously, the rest of the provisions can be amended. For this reason, it would be more appropriate to consider 2008 as a year of constitutional opportunities rather than a year of constitutional crisis."

Legal Actions against DTP MPs

Hurriyet, Milliyet, Sabah, Radikal, Cumhuriyet, Zaman and others report the Ankara prosecutor has asked parliament to lift the immunity of DTP deputy Ahmet Turk for "insulting the military." The prosecutor sent the warrant to the Justice Ministry, from where it will be submitted to parliament. Ahmet Turk criticized the exclusion of DTP lawmakers from an August 30th Turkish General Staff (TGS) reception.

Meanwhile, Interior Minister Besir Atalay said there is evidence suggesting DTP MP Pervin Buldan's car was used for drug smuggling. Buldan rejected the charge, saying she is the target of a defamation campaign.

Meanwhile, police searched the pro-Kurdish DTP office in the southeastern city of Gaziantep and arrested provincial deputy leader Mehmet Aslanoglu for making PKK propaganda.

Turkey to Issue Annual Human Rights Report

Mainstream Milliyet reports the Prime Ministry Human Rights Board will release annual reports regarding human rights in Turkey. The Board's Chairman, Professor Hasan Fendoglu, said they were drawing a "map of human rights violations across Turkey." Statistical data and commentary on human rights violations would be compiled for all provinces in the country. Fendoglu said, "Our reports will contain data, comments and suggestions for solutions," concerning human rights issues.

TV Highlights

NTV

Domestic News

- On January 24, Deputy Chief of the Turkish General Staff (TGS) Ergin Saygun will go to the US for meetings with key Pentagon officials and the high-level defense group.
- Prosecutors unexpectedly demanded a 25-year prison sentence for a police officer who fired at a young motorist in Izmir in November.
- The Turkish General Staff (TGS) website said Wednesday two PKK militants were captured in Silopi while they tried to cross the border into Turkey.

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- Turkey's annual exports for 2007 amount to USD 105.9 million, which is 23.49 % above the figure for the previous year. However, exporters are concerned about rising electricity and natural gas prices.

International News

- Despite opposition from the Iraqi Central Government in Baghdad, Iraq's Kurdish regional administration signed a USD 800 million deal with Canadian firms to build three oil refineries.
- Results from the Iowa caucuses will be announced Thursday night.
- Following the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, Pakistan has decided to postpone the January 8th elections until February 18th.
- The US Embassy, Israeli Embassy, and the British High Commission were evacuated in Canberra, Australia after mysterious packages were found.

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